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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9819

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4884

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7706

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1422

RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0294

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 005106

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/26/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV PREF PHUM KDEM TH BM

SUBJECT: MFA PERMSEC UPDATES THAI VIEW ON BURMA

REF: BANGKOK 5036 (THAI FM ON BURMA AND MORE)

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The Ambassador called Thai MFA Permanent Secretary Virasakdi Futrakul on September 26 and expressed concern about indications (reftel) of RTG reluctance to press the Burmese government for a peaceful outcome to the ongoing crisis. Virasakdi said the MFA had released a brief public statement (see para 4), following a similar statement issued by the Singaporean government. The real action, Virasakdi said, would take place on Friday in New York, when ASEAN Foreign Ministers meet. Virasakdi said that "everyone" was waiting to see what, if anything, would come out of that meeting. The Thais hoped for a signal from the Burmese that there would be a peaceful outcome to the current crisis.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador asked if Thai military officers were discussing the situation with their Burmese counterparts. Virasakdi said the Thai military was mostly focused on planning for a possible evacuation of Thai nationals from Burma. He added that the Thai Embassy in Rangoon was asked one week ago to arrange to take Thai citizen prisoners out of Burmese jails. This could indicate that the Burmese planned massive arrests, although it was also possible that the Burmese wanted to allow the RTG to safeguard its citizens in the event of prison riots coinciding with demonstrations in the streets.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador asked Virasakdi's prediction of how events would unfold. Virasakdi, who previously served as Ambassador to Burma in the early 1990's, said the Burmese appeared to be in the process of deciding whether to use force. He had heard reports that the 77th Division of the Burmese Army had been moved from Pantawadee (phonetic) and had been deployed near the Suray (phonetic) Pagoda. Virasakdi believed the Burmese would want to avoid a 1988-style crackdown, recalling a Burmese official remarking to him, after the bloody May 1992 crackdown on Bangkok

protestors, that the Thai security forces were fortunate to have crowd-control training; the Burmese had lacked this type of skill in 1988.

¶4. (U) The MFA's September 25 statement reads: "The Royal Thai Government is monitoring closely the situation in Myanmar. As a fellow ASEAN member country and a close neighbour of Myanmar, we sincerely hope that there will be peace and national reconciliation in Myanmar."

¶5. (C) Post also reached out to Burmese exiles in Thailand to solicit their views. One contact told us that Thai-Burma unofficial border checkpoints (where "day passes" are issued) had been closed and the Thai policy on movement over the border had become "more strict." He noted his contacts, Thais and Burmese, had not prepared for this uprising; no one had thought the demonstrations would gain momentum so quickly. Another contact told us that many Burmese felt that, now that events have reached this level of intensity, they did not want to lose the opportunity for change; if the current demonstrations were to fizzle without meaningful impact, another such opportunity might not arise again for 10 to 20 years.

BOYCE